

Ekadasi

Introduction

Ekadasi is a wonderful opportunity for all spiritual practitioners to intensify their devotional service and come closer to Krsna. While the Ekadasi day can be seen as an austerity - not eating grains or not using your favourite spices; it is like the poison which turns out to be nectar. The tongue is the most voracious and difficult to control of all the senses but Krsna sends His Prasad just to help us conquer this fickle friend. Ekadasi is another form of Krsna Prasad and just as a child may in later life develop taste for items previously abhorred, we can perhaps keep an open mind that 'maybe Ekadasi is for me after all.'

This humble offering hopes to inspire you: in your attraction to Sri Ekadasi and perhaps increased understanding of this wonderful day. For those unfamiliar with Ekadasi we will explain the whyfores, wherefores and basic rules of following Ekadasi, and for those already accustomed with Ekadasi practices we offer some inspiring history, background and further techniques for better obedience of Sri Ekadasi.

What is Ekadasi?

There are two Ekadasi days each month and they are astronomically calculated according to the Moon. The word Ekadasi literally means the eleventh day, eka (one) + das (ten) = eleven. So an Ekadasi generally falls eleven days after a full Moon and eleven days after a new Moon. Although there are sometimes exceptions to the rule.

There are multilayers to Ekadasi. Twice a month Krsna bestows His mercy in the form of this special day of benediction. During an Ekadasi, Bhakti or Devotional Service should be emphasized. Specifically ekanga Bhakti should be practiced, namely chanting the holy names - Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare.

In order to better facilitate increased Bhakti, Ekadasi is a day of reduced worldly affairs. While there are mandatory principles for following Ekadasi, the general meaning is that it is Harivasara or Krsna's day and therefore the time be spent as much as possible directly engaging in Krsna Consciousness.

Srila Prabhupada introduced Ekadasi as an obligatory practice for all Vaishnava devotees. The Ekadasi *vrata* or vow is an extremely important aspect of devotional life. It may be followed differently according to time, place and circumstance; but such a munificent opportunity should not be polly-foxed or bypassed.

"To observe Ekadasi-vrata and Dvadasi-vrata means to please the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Those interested in advancing in Krsna consciousness must observe Ekadasi-vrata regularly."

SB 9.4.29 pp

Fasting

eka dasyam na bhunjita vratam etad dhih vaisnavam

Full eating is condemned on Ekadasi and fasting on that day is certainly very pleasing to Lord Krsna.

Hari Bhakti Vilas 12/6

Fasting is an aspect of Ekadasi that is in itself multifaceted. Fasting does not simply refer to total negation. As this verse says 'full' eating is condemned; the purport being that frivolous feasting is most heinous. The idea is *anukalpa* - *anu* means 'near to' and *kalpa* means 'able', so one fasts as much as one is able. Standard prescriptions for what can and can't be taken are given in the section called Anukalpa.

The most important aspect of the Ekadasi fast is to avoid grains. From His youth Sri Krsna-Caitanya Mahaprabhu taught:

"Ekadasite anna na khaibe - Please do not eat grains on Ekadasi."

Cc. Adi 15/9

The reason for not eating grains is given in the Padma Purana by Srila Vyasadeva and is retold in the section - The Story of Ekadasi.

The exoteric restriction of abstaining from grains is certainly a central tenet or pillar of the Ekadasi vrata; however, eschewing grama katha (mundane talks) and kutinati (fault finding) will also please Krsna very much and award one massively increased rewards in devotion. The word fast has multiple meaning but the principle meaning is actually 'firmly fixed' - by fasting on Ekadasi we will get stuck on Krsna and Krsna will be stuck fast to us.

sri-radhovaca
sri-krsnasya prasadartham
kurutaikadasi-vratam
tena vasyo harih saksad
bhavisyati na samsayah

Sri Radha said: To attain Lord Krsna's mercy you should follow the vow of fasting on Ekadasi. In that way You will make Lord Krsna into your submissive servant. Of this there is no doubt.

Garga Samhita 4/9

Full Fasting

Where full fasting is possible then that is very nice but for practical purposes Srila Prabhupada established an user friendly system that all can follow. The general import is to eat only as much as absolutely required and chant as much as possible. If devotees are following very strictly they should not become proud and flaunt their austerities around. Actually one should not speak to others at all about his or her austerities; rather, by keeping them to oneself the possibility of pride will be avoided. They must also be respectful to those who are taking a little Prasad. Health comes first and the maximisation of service to Krsna is most important.

"Actually, on the Ekadasi day we should not take any food or even drink water. But in our Society we are not observing it so strictly. We say that on Ekadasi you must not take any food grains but you may take a little fruit and milk. This

is tapasya. So, we cannot execute this tapasya? If we are not prepared to undertake even this very, very easily executable tapasya, then how can we expect to go back home, back to Godhead? It will not be possible."

BTG 19-10

Unless there is some very serious health issue then grains can be avoided. Ayurveda cites the stomach as the central powerhouse of all illness so by eating simple, easily digestible items-you will actually be helping improve your health.

By the practice of eating only Anukalpa (Non Grain Ekadasi Prasad) one can gradually acquire the sakti (energy / determination) to do a water fast or eventually a nirjala fast i.e. not drinking water. Not that we use our hypochondrial illnesses as excuses; still we must be aware that we are unaware of others internal situation. If someone is unable to fast fully, then better they take a little Prasad and engage in Krsna Consciousness.

Fasting from grains is not a very difficult thing. For one day only one can eat simply, avoid all grains and receive magnificent results. Srila Prabhupada would often perform half-day fasts simply breakfasting at noon-time. This is still a goodly powerful fast and it's by far in a way better to complete a shorter fast successfully and gain determination to do more next time than to bite off more than one can chew. Still, Ekadasi is all auspicious since 'failures are the pillars of success.'

Sleeping Breaks the Fast!

Sleeping breaks the fast! This is an important point that should be taken to heart. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura seriously admonished his disciples who tried to fast completely on Ekadasi but then ended up sleeping. All yoga processes have as an inherent quality - *abhyasa* or practice. This practice is classified by moderation.

"One should be careful not to eat too much, sleep too much or remain in a comfortable position. Voluntarily accepting some penances and difficulties, one should take less food and less sleep. These are the procedures for practicing any kind of yoga, whether bhakti-yoga, jnana-yoga or hatha-yoga."

SB 3.33.14

"So it is not required that don't eat, don't sleep, don't... But minimize it; at least, regulate it, try."

SB 1.1.1

Fatness

"We can definitely see that to advance in Krsna consciousness one must control his bodily weight. If one becomes too fat, it is to be assumed that he is not advancing spiritually. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura severely criticized his fat disciples. The idea is that one who intends to advance in Krsna consciousness must not eat very much. Devotees used to go to forests, high hills or mountains on pilgrimages, but such severe austerities are not possible in these days. One should instead eat only prasada and no more than required. According to the Vaisnava calendar, there are many fasts, such as Ekadasi and the appearance and disappearance days of God and His devotees.

All of these are meant to decrease the fat within the body so that one will not sleep more than desired and will not become inactive and lazy. Overindulgence in food will cause a man to sleep more than required. This human form of life is meant for austerity, and austerity means controlling sex, food intake, etc. In this way time can be saved for spiritual activity, and one can purify himself both externally and internally. Thus both body and mind can be cleansed."

SB 4.28.35-36 pp

Krsna Katha

Krsna Katha is the real food!

"The entire world is suffering because of spiritual thirst. Every living being is Brahman, or spirit soul, and needs spiritual food to satisfy his hunger and thirst. Unfortunately, however, the world is completely unaware of the nectar of krsna-katha. The Krsna consciousness movement is therefore a boon to philosophers, religionists and people in general. There is certainly a charming attraction in Krsna and krsna-katha."

SB 10.1.13 pp

The real punya or virtues of Ekadasi are sva-kathah krsnah punya-sravana-kirtanah - properly hearing and chanting Krsna's messages which are in themselves virtuous.

Guru Gauranga Also Fast

Devotee: On Ekadasi, we can offer the Deity grains?

Prabhupada: Oh, yes. But not guru. Ekadasi observed by jiva-tattva, not by Vishnu. We are fasting for clearing our material disease, but Radha-Krsna, Caitanya Mahaprabhu . . . Caitanya Mahaprabhu also may not be offered grains because He is playing the part of a devotee. Only Radha-Krsna, Jagannatha can be offered grains. Otherwise, Guru-Gauranga, no. And the prasadam should not be taken by anyone. It should be kept for the next day.

[Srila Prabhupada Room Conversation, Tokyo, April 22, 1972]

Timing The Fast

The science of calculating when Ekadasi begins is complicated and obviously only a very slight insight is given here. Basically the lunar tithi (day) is obviously calculated by the moon, but by the solar calendar each day always begins at sunrise. Both the Lunar and Solar aspects are considered when determining Ekadasi.

For an Ekadasi proper the day must begin in accordance with Arunodaya Viddhi (The Rules of the Witching Hour): approximately one hour twelve minutes before Sunrise. When the day is calculated to begin in this way it is called Suddha Ekadasi or Pure Ekadasi and is suitable for fasting. If the day starts after the Arunodaya Viddhi it is considered impure and the fast is observed the following day Dwadasi, when this happens the two days are sort of synergised and the Dwadasi is called Mahadwadasi. A full description of the

Lunar & Solar calculation of Sri Ekadasi is given in Hari Bhakti Vilas though it's much easier to follow a preprepared calendar. An excellent GBC calendar system can be found here <http://www.krishnadays.com/>

Breaking The Fast

Whichever day the fast takes place one should fast from Sunrise to Sunrise. It's good practice to abstain from grains the previous evening so there will not be grain in your system the following morning. Throughout the day of fasting however, one can happily gorge himself silly on Krsna Kirtan & Katha - until fit to burst!

When it comes to breaking the fast one must be very intelligent and controlled. George Bernard Shaw famously said: "Any fool can go on a fast but it takes a wise man to break one properly." There is a calculation for breakfasting (parana) and one should carefully observe this. Not that as soon one wakes up he stuffs the face. This last leg of the fast is a very potent time, the devotee chants his rounds and meditates "off" the bodily platform.

At the time of breaking one will feel ecstatic at having made it through the full period successfully, all the more so when the break is nicely controlled. One will factually be a goswami!

A good technique is to spread the breakfast out a little. Rehydrate a little at a time, take something light and be kind to your stomach - Krsna's stomach! If one has observed a full fast i.e. no water then there is no need to break with grains. The devotee can breakfast with Caranamrita or fruit; however if the fast was observed by eating Anukalpa Prasad then it must be broken by taking grains.

If the fast is accidentally broken on the Ekadasi day then fasting should be observed again on the following day!

"Because it was Ekadasi we skipped breakfast and fasted until noon. But at lunchtime the devotees inadvertently broke the Ekadasi vow because the cook accidentally put peas into the vegetables. No one noticed until too late. Fortunately I arrived late for lunch because I had been massaging Srila Prabhupada. Just as I was about to eat, Jayapataka Maharaja shouted for me to stop. Although initially annoyed at being told not to eat, I was relieved when he pointed out the peas.

Shamefaced, Tamal Krishna Maharaja went to Prabhupada to report what had happened and to find out what should be done.

Srila Prabhupada told us we were all nonsense. He angrily rebuked us, "Now you have to fast for three days!" This shocked everyone. "Yes, that is the procedure," he confirmed. Seeing the stunned look on our faces he relented but said that we should observe Ekadasi for the rest of the day and then again tomorrow on Dvadasi."

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Concluding Words

Sri Ekadasi - the sweet taste of this delightfully dulcet day can be experienced by all who learn how to float on it's gently undulating ripples of love. By concentrating the focus of our activities on Ekadasi the charming paramour known as Krsna will be most pleased and His divine consort Srimati Radharani hearing of our endeavour will indubitably bestow Her merciful

glance upon us in the form of seva-bhava.

The shinningly effulgent toenails of the Lord are most dazzling to the eye, by praying for the removal of this daze one can slowly yet surely be magnetically witness to and delicatesses the beatific form of Krsna. His lotus face benign and his illimitable flute capture the heart and one may find herself swaying in rapture as she genuinely chants the holy name of Krsna.

asvamedha-sahasrani
rajasuya-satani ca
ekadasy-upavasasya
kalah narhanti sodasim

Less than a mere sixteenth of the results accrued by fasting on Ekadasi totally eclipses the results of one hundred raja-suya yajnas and one thousand asvamedha yajnas!

Garga Samhita 8.41

meru-mandara-matrani
papani sata-janmasu
ekam caikadasim gopyo
dahate tula-rasi-vat

O Gopis as fire can immediately burn a great pile of cotton, so even just one Ekadasi can burn the great Mount Meru of sins accumulated over one hundred births.

Garga Samhita 8.44